ESSENTIALS OF ISLAM Series

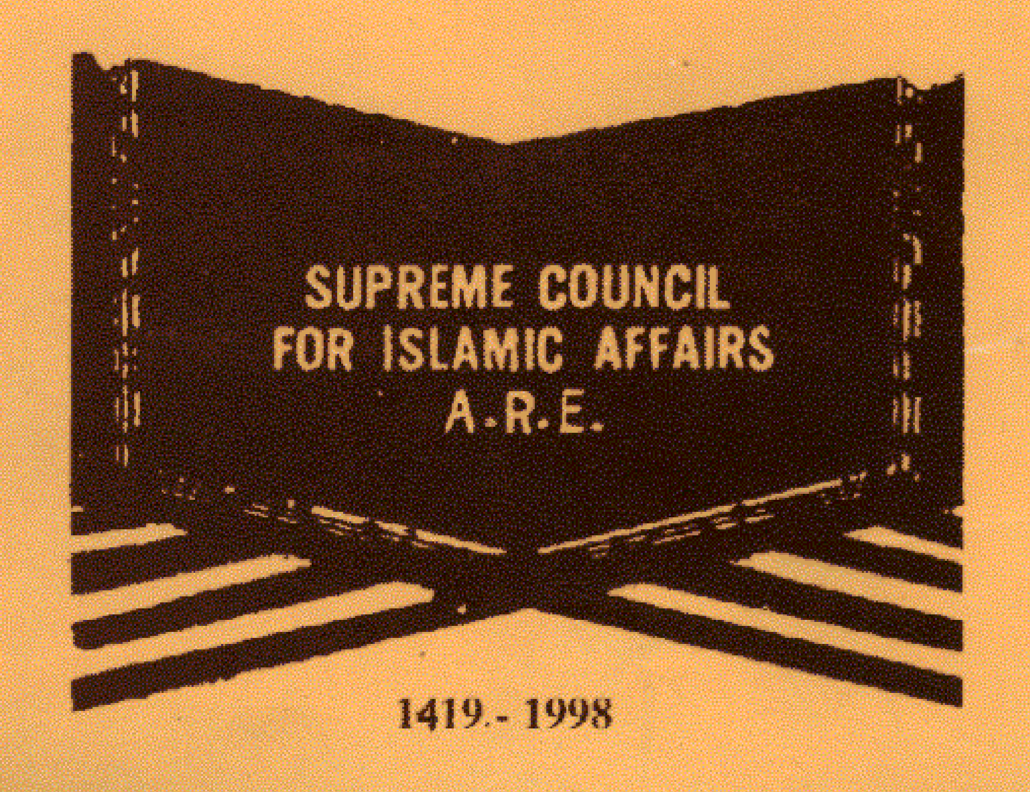
AL SIYAM

"FASTING"

By

EL-BAHAY EL-KHOLI

Translated by : M. HAWARY AHMAD



1419.- 1998



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SERIES

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is the second in a series designed to state as briefly as possible the essentials of Islam.

No questions of history or philosophy have been raised or discussed. The plain truth about Islam have been stated in a clear and concise manner.

It is hoped that people with very little knowledge of Islam will find in this series a direct introduction to the essentials of Islam. It will help even those who want to be initiated into the study of Islam.

SHAWKI SUKKARY

" The translation of the Qurânic verses cited here is a mere interpretation of the meaning."

INTRODUCTION

Almighty Allah said : "You who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may (learn) self-restraint."

It is evident from this verse that fasting (siyam) is an ancient form of worship, prescribed for us Muslims as well as other nations which preceded us, ever since the time of Adam.

Muslim scholars (ulamas) differed in their opinions as to what is specifically meant by the reference in the verse :

"Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you..."

Some claimed that the verse referred to the time prescribed for the fast that is to say, that Allah commanded the Jews and Christians also to fast during the month of Ramadân. Jews and Christians, however, added more fasting days over and above the days of Ramadân, then shifted the fasting from Ramadân to other dates.

Other scholars said that the reference deals with the nature of fasting, in that it is an ordinance to abstain from things breaking the fast *(muftirât)* and forbidden acts *(mahzurât)*.

Some believed that the reference is concerned with fasting as being an obligatory ordinance, that is, Muslims, Jews and Christians alike are called upon to observe it, but that we differ from them as to the time during which it falls and the manner of observance.

The commentary al-Manâr has this to say of the fasting of Jews and Christians :

"Nowhere in the books of the Old Testament do we find any definite text to prove that fasting was prescribed. We simply find praise of fasting and commendation of those who fast. It is known that Moses has fasted for forty days and this proves that fasting was considered a form of worship. Nowadays, Jews fast one week in remembrance of the devastation of Jerusalem and they also fast one day in August. It is reported that the Jews were ordered in the Torah to fast the tenth day of the seventh month. They used to fast that day together with its night and it is probably what they used to term *ashoura*. There are other fasting days which they observe."

Likewise, there is no evidence in the known gospels of the new Testament to prove the obligatory nature of fasting so far as Christians are concerned. Fasting is simply mentioned as praise-worthy and is considered a rite. A person who fasts is ordered, according to the New Testament, to anoint his head and wash his face in order to remove all outward signs of the fast for fear that he might seem a hypocrite like the Pharisees. The best-known and oldest of Christian fasts is that of Lent, which precedes Easter. It is the same fasting period observed by Moses and Jesus and his apostles. Church leaders prescribed other forms of fast including abstinence from

eating meat, fish, eggs and milk. There are differences, however, among the various churches with regard to these prescriptions. Early Christians used to follow the fasting procedure observed by the Jews, partaking of only one meal every twenty four hours. It was later modified to fasting from midnight to mid-day.

According to the commentary Al-Manâr, "Fasting is an ancient form of worship recognized by previous religions — even heathen ones. It constituted an essential part of every religion. It was known to the ancient Egyptians, from whom it passed on to the ancient Greeks, who used to enforce it, principally, upon their women. The Romans also observed the fast and pagans in India and elsewhere practise fasting to this day"

Other pagans who observed the fast include :

1) The Sabaeans of Harran : they were ordered by their religion to abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset for thirty days.

2) The Manoites (followers of Mani) : their religion commanded that they also abstain from food and drink in the same manner and for the same period.

3) The Indians have certain holy days upon which they fast. For certain spiritual ends they have to fast completely for a whole month. In order to attain some of those spiritual objectives they may fast a whole year, breaking the fast only once on the first day of each of the twelve months.

"That you may (learn) self-restraint." Allah followed up the command to observe fasting by these words :

"That you may (learn) self-restraint...", since genuine fasting helps us overcome lusts and thereby sets us at the beginning of the road leading to perfection.

To take this path, it is necessary to be always on the alert lest those lusts afflict the heart once more, and this is the meaning of *taqwâ* or self-restraint.

***Taqwâ,* indeed, is a function of the heart and is a voluntary effort comprising the elements of caution, alertness and fear of God. The Prophet used to point to his chest saying :**

"Here is the seat of *taqwâ.*"

According to Abu Sulaymân al-Dârâni : The pious (al-Muttaqûn) "are those whose hearts are purified by Allah from all lusts." In fact, once a person's heart has been thus purged, his actions will be for the sake of Allah, his speech addressed to Allah and his fate controlled by Allah alone.

This would be the road leading to perfection.

Al-Bustâni was once asked to define a pious person (al-Muttaqi). He said : "He is one whose speech is addressed only to Allah and whose work is meant for Allah".

Ubbay Ibn Ka'ab understood (taqwâ) to mean cautiousness.

Once Omar asked him to define it and his reply was :

"Have you ever walked along a thorny road ?"

"Yes." Omar answered.

"What did you do ?" Ubbay asked.

Omar said : "I was cautious".

"That is taqwâ", said Ubbay.

THE FAST OF RAMADAN

"Ramadân is the month wherein the Qurân was revealed for the guidance of mankind and to serve as the criterion (of right and wrong). Whosoever of you is present in this month shall fast it, and whosoever is sick or on a journey shall fast an equal number of days later on. Allah desires ease for you and does not want to subject you to hardship so that you could complete the prescribed period (of fast) and that you may glorify Allah for having guided you, that perchance ye shall be grateful." (The Qurân).

Stages of Development :

According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state :

1) When the Prophet came to Medina, he used to fast three days every month in addition to the Day of Ashoura. As things were, Muslims were not required, when they first arrived in Medina, to fast more than three days every month. Mu'âdh, Qatâda and 'Atâ, claimed — as reported by Ibn Abbas — that those three days were meant by the verse... "for a fixed number of days".

2) The consensus of opinion however, differs. It considers the reference to "a fixed number of days" to mean the month of Ramadân. This difference of opinion over the number of days did not, in any case, touch th essential question of the necessity to fast three days every month.

3) Explaining the fast of the Day of Ashoura, Ibn 'Abbâs reported that the Prophet had noticed that the Jews in Medina observed the fast on that day. The Prophet asked the reason for it and he was told by the Jews that it was a memorable day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. Moses therefore observed it as a day of fasting, whereupon the Prophet told the Jews : "Moses is closer to me than he is to you." He then observed the day as a fast and instructed the Muslims to fast upon it. He sent out a man to tour Medina on that day and announce to the Muslims that : "He who had already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day and he who had not, shall fast the day. Today is the Day of Ashoura."

4) When the fast of Ramadân was prescribed in the second year of the Hijra, the fast on those days was abolished. The Prophet said : "The fast of Ramadân has abolished every other fast".

5) It is reported that 'Aisha once said : "When the Prophet came to Medina he observed the Day of Ashoura as a day of fasting. When the fast of Ramadân was prescribed, the Prophet said :

"Whoever wishes may fast upon it, and whoever wishes may drop it".

6) The second stage begins when God prescribed the fast of Ramadân. The new ordinance was announced in three verses. The first two were revealed together, followed later by the third.

In the first two verses, God said : "You who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you that ye may learn self-restraint. (Fast) for a fixed number of days, and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey shall fast an equal number of days later on. Those who can afford to fast (but do not) shall have to redeem themselves by feeding a poor person. But whosover does good of his own accord it is better for him, and that you fast is better for you if you did but know."

God thus permits the sick and the man on a journey to miss fasting during Ramadân. A man will then have to make restitution of those days by fasting a similar number of days when he becomes well again, or when he is no longer on the road.

A man who is not sick or travelling and who is physically fit has a choice — either to fast or not. In the latter case he has to pay the *fidya* (ransom), which is the feeding of a poor person for every day he does not keep the fast. In this connection, Mu'âdh said that in the early days of Islam, a man could fast or disregard the ordinance, provided he fed a poor person every day he broke the fast. Al-Bukhâri reported more than one *hadith* (saying of the Prophet) to this effect.

The third verse is the one in which God said :

"Ramadân is the month wherein the Qurân was revealed for the guidance of mankind and to serve as the criterion, (of right and wrong). Whosoever of you is present in this month shall fast it, and whosoever is sick or on a journey shall fast an equal number of days later"... etc.

It is to be noticed that the verse remained silent about those "who could afford it." Al-Bukhâri reported, according to many of the Prophet's companions, many *Ahadith* to the effect that the third verse had abrogated those before it and made it obligatory for the physically fit to keep the fast, thus abolishing the choice.

The third stage deals with the times of abstinence and indulgence — there were times of abstinence during the night as well as during the day :

(a) When a man had said his *'ishâ* prayers (last evening prayers) he was supposed to abstain from *(muftirât)*, that is food, drink and women after prayers.

(b) If a man slept (even before saying the *'ishâ* prayers) he should abstain when he awoke.

Thus saying the *'ishâ* prayers and sleep forced a man into a state of abstinence for the rest of the night and the following day until sunset. This was a hard condition for the early Muslims for a man might dose off before *iftâr* (breakfast), and thus had to continue his fast until the same time next day. It is told that Qays Ibn Sarma al-Ansâri spent the day working in the field. At sunset he returned home and rested while his wife

was preparing his meal. When she returned with it he was sound asleep and when he awoke he had to continue the fast ; by mid-day he fainted. Later, he told the Prophet about it and God revealed the verse :

"It is lawful for you on the night of the fast to go unto your wives; they are your garment. Allah knows that ye defraud yourselves therein, so he turns towards you and forgives you. So go in unto them and seek what Allah has ordained for you, and eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black thread, then observe the fast till nightfall."

Muslims were overjoyed by the relaxation.

THE MERIT OF FASTING

Fasting enjoys, in the eyes of God, a grace unparallelled by other acts of piety and worship.

In a *qudsi hadith* (utterances attributed to God outside the Qurân), Allah says : "All man's work belongs to him. A good deed is repaid from tenfold to seven hundred times". Go said : "Fasting belongs to Me and I repay."

The Prophet said : "By He in whose hands Muhammad's soul rests, Allah prefers the stench of the mouth of he who fasts to the scent of musk."

THE MERIT OF RAMADAN

Al-Bukhâri and Muslim both reported that the Prophet had said : "With the advent of Ramadân, the portals of Paradise are opened, the gates to hell are closed, and the devils are chained."

According to Abu Hurayra, the Prophet said at the beginning of Ramadân : "A glorious and blessed month has come. Allah ordained that you fast during it. During this month, the portals of Paradise are opened, the gates of hell are closed, and the devils are chained. In this month there is one night which is worth more than one thousand months".

THE MERIT OF RAMADAN FAST

The Prophet said : "Whoever fasts during Ramadân out of faith seeking no reward, will have all his past sins forgiven."

Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet also said :

"Whoever breaks the fast even for one day in Ramadân without any legitimate reason, cannot compensate for it by a period of fasting at another time during the year".

REGULATIONS GOVERNING THE FAST OF RAMADAN

Fasting means to refrain and abstain, from dawn till sunset, from certain things forbidden by Islamic Law. These are dealt with later. Fasting is divided into two main categories :

a) *Fard* (obligatory fasting), which comprises the following :

(i) Ramadân fast.
(ii) Kaffâra (the fasting of atonement).
(iii) Nadhr (relating to the taking of a vow).

b) *Tatawwu'* (voluntary fasting), which is confined to those additional days throughout the year which the Prophet used to observe as fasting days.

Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam.

The Prophet said : "Islam is built on five pillars : the *shahâda* (profession of faith) that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, *salât* (prayers), *zakât* (alms-tax), the *sawn* of Ramadân (fast) and *hajj* (pilgrimage).

Ramadân fast was prescribed on the second Monday of the month of *Sha'bân,* in the second year of the Hijra.

Fasting is obligatory for every Muslim provided that he or she is adult and in full possession of his or her faculties.

Exemptions for temporary causes include :

(i) Women in menstruation or child-birth bleeding.

(ii) Persons in sick bed or on a journey.

These exemptions will be discussed later.

It is preferable that children, though they are not under obligation to fast, should be trained in fasting in order to prepare them for carrying out their adult obligations in this respect.

Al-Rabi Bint Mu'awwadh said in this connection : "On the Day of Ashoura, the Prophet had a man tour the villages of the Ansâr (the original inhabitants of Medina who supported the Prophet) ordering those who had not yet partaken of food to fast during the day and those who had eaten to abstain and fast the rest of the day. Later, we used to fast that day and have our small children fast upon it. We used to take them to the mosque and give them toys made of wool to distract them from their hunger until *iftâr* time". (i.e. the breaking of the fast).

THE OFFICIAL BEGINNING AND END OF RAMADAN

1) The beginning of Ramadân becomes official when the new moon is seen. Its end is officially fixed when the new moon of the next month (Shawwâl), is seen. Once the new moon of Ramadân is seen, fasting becomes obligatory for all those who are required to fast it. When the new moon of Shawwâl is seen, the fast comes to an end, and everybody should break the fast. The Prophet said : "Fast when you see it (the new moon) and break the fast when you see it (the new moon)."

2) The seeing of the new moon becomes official by the testimony of one upright Muslim.

Ibn 'Abbâs reported : "A Bedouin came to the Prophet announcing that he had seen the new moon of Ramadân, whereupon the Prophet asked him: "Do you profess that there is no God but Allah ?"

The Bedouin said : "Yes." Then the Prophet asked him : "Do you profess that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah ?" The Bedouin answered : "Yes". The Prophet then ordered Bilâl

(his muazzin) to call on the Muslims to fast the next day".

3) As to the seeing of the new moon of Shawwâl, announcing the end of Ramadân fast, the testimony of one upright Muslim is not enough.

In his commentary on Muslim's collection of *hadith*, al- Nabawi said that the 'ulamas were unanimous that the testimony of one upright Muslim for the Shawwâl new moon is not enough, except Abu Thawr who considered it fair.

4) In the event of it being impossible to see the new moon of Ramadân because of weather conditions, then the month of Sha'bân (the month preceding Ramadân) should be a full thirty days.

The Prophet said : "Fast when you see the new moon and break the fast when you see the new moon ; but if it is hidden, let Sha'bân be completed as thirty days".

5) Likewise, in case of the new moon of Sha'bân not being visible because of bad weatehr conditions, Ramadân shall be a full thirty days, on the strength of the Prophet's instruction to "fast when you see the new moon and break the fast when you see the new moon and if it is hidden by cloud or fog, count thirty days".

6) Man's knowledge of astronomy is now very accurate, so much so that astronomers can calculate the hour, minute and second (every day of the lunar year) of the appearance and

disappearance of the moon in every country of the world.

This information is published in advance of every lunar year. Therefore, a man who has acquired this information can, even when he cannot actually see the new moon, fix the beginning and end of his fast accordingly. The Prophet says in this connection: "Fast when you see it, and break the fast when you see it ; but if you cannot see it, calculate it." In his commentary on the Qurân, al-Qurtubi said : "Matraf Ibn Abdullah, a prominent figure of the generation following the Prophet, and Ibn Qutayba, a famous linguist, stated that astronomical calculations should be resorted to in cases of cloudy skies, and that these calculations be regarded as official." This verdict was accepted at a time when the knowledge of astronomy was not so extensive and accurate as it is today. Such a verdict should be even more acceptable at the present time.

It is to be noted here that the Prophet, addressing the ordinary man, ordered that the month be counted as thirty in case the new moon could not be seen ; whereas, addressing people to whom astronomical knowledge was available, said that the month should be calculated.

This is an example of the wisdom of the Prophet in addressing each group of people according to their educational standards.

7) The appearance of the new moon may differ from one country to the other, even though they may all be in the same latitude. For instance, if the new moon is seen in one country, the appearance is valid so far as those countries to its west are concerned, but not so for countries to its east.

Kurayb told the following story...

"I saw the new moon in Damascus on Friday. At the end of the month I arrived in Medina. Ibn 'Abbâs asked me about the new moon and I said that I and everyone else had seen it on Friday, and that everyone including Mu'âwiya observed the fast on that day. Ibn 'Abbâs said that the people in Medina had seen the new moon on Saturday and that they were still fasting in order to complete thirty days. I asked if the witnessing of the new moon and the fasting of Mu'âwiya were not enough testimony for him. Ibn 'Abbâs replied : "No, for this is how the Prophet instructed us".

Medina, where Ibn 'Abbâs lived, is to the east of Damascus. That is why Ibn 'Abbâs had to abide by the Prophet's instructions until the new moon could be seen on Saturday in Medina.

8) If the new moon is seen in any country, the people of every other country falling in the same longitude should observe the fast on the same day.

9) There is a school of Muslim thought which considers that the people of any country where the new moon is seen can deputize for all Muslims everywhere in the world. Thus fasting begins with the seeing of the new moon in that country, likewise in all other countries even though the new moon might not have been seen there.

THE INTENTION TO FAST DURING RAMADAN

For the fast of Ramadân to be valid, one has to make up one's mind, or formulate the intention, during the night of the day he will fast.

Hafsa reported that the Prophet said : "Whoever did not make up his mind to fast before dawn, then his fast is not valid".

The intention is an act of the heart; it is not necessary to utter it; it is enough to harbour it. The Prophet said : "Acts are judged by the intentions prompting them".

Commenting on the *hadith* reported by Hafsa, al-Shukâni said that it makes it necessary to formulate the intention to fast at any time of the night and that it is necessary to renew the intention every day of fasting.

The intention is essential only in the *fard* (obligatory fasting). It could be formulated during the day in the *tatawwu'* (i.e. voluntary) fast.

THE FAST OF DOUBTFUL DAYS

The Prophet's Companions had different opinions as to the fast of doubtful days. Some of them permitted it, whilst others forbade it. The opinion of the opposite has more weight because of a verdict pronounced by Abu Ammâr to the effect that "whoever fasts a doubtful day would, in fact be disobeying the Prophet."

However, a man is permitted to fast a doubtful day, should such a day fall within the number of days which a man has been actually fasting. The Prophet's instruction in this connection is : "No man shall fast one or two days before Ramadân, unless he was already observing a fast".

It is the custom of the Muslims to look for the crescent moon on the evening of 29th of Sha'bân. If it does not appear, the following day is considered a doubtful day being neither the end of Sha'bân nor the beginning of Ramadân. The Muslims are not allowed to fast on such a day.

THINGS TO ABSTAIN FROM DURING THE FAST

The person who fasts should abstain from the following :

1) Food, drink and sexual intercourse from dawn until sunset, in accordance with the verse of

the Qurân : "Now therefore go unto them and seek what Allah — has ordained for you, and eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black thread, then observe the fast till nightfall".

The black thread means the darkness of night and the white thread means the light of day at dawn.

Every Muslim may, during the night, satisfy his needs with regard to food, drink and women. When dawn comes he must abstain till sunset.

Smoking, drug taking and the injection of nourishing solutions into the body (e.g. calcium or vitamins) are strictly forbidden.

Sexual intercourse must be followed by complete ablution, i.e. a bath covering all parts of the body.

The Prophet forbade Muslims who are fasting to indulge in any of the following :

(a) Obscene speech. The Prophet said: "While fasting, you shall not indulge in obscene speech or boisterous talk. If someone insults you or quarrels with you, tell him : 'I am one who fasts.' "

b) Falsehood in speech or action. The Prophet said : "He who does not abstain from falsehood in words or deeds, God has no need for him to abstain from his food and drink."

(*c*) Slander. One day the Prophet passed by women who, while fasting, were gossiping. He said : "These two women abstained from what God had ordered them to do an indulged in what God had forbidden them to do".

(*d*) Lying, lustful looks, false oath, slander and calumny. The Prophet said : "Five things spoil a man's fast — lying, slander, calumny, the false oath and the lustful look."

Some 'ulama believe that those forbidden things spoil one's fast. They base their verdict on the Prophet's warning that "five things spoil a man's fast... etc." and other sayings mentioned earlier. They also base their verdict on a definite quotation. The Prophet said : "There may be a man whose gain from his fast is confined to hunger and thirst". These 'ulama include Ibn Hazm and the late rector of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltout.

A second group of 'ulama believe that these forbidden things do not spoil the fast, but abstention from them makes one's fast more complete.

THINGS WHICH SPOIL THE FAST

1) Ramadân fast is spoiled if a person deliberately eats, drinks, or indulges in sexual intercourse.

(*a*) Deliberate eating or drinking, spoils the fast and necessitates asking for forgiveness.

(b) Deliberate sexual intercourse spoils the fast and necessitates *qadâ* (restitution) of another days' fast in place of it as well as *Kaffâra* (atonement).

Kaffâra is to set free a slave, or a fast of two consecutive months, or the feeding of sixty poor people. This is based on the following story :

"A man told the Prophet : "I have commited a deadly sin."

The Prophet asked : "What was it ?"

The man said : "I slept with my wife during Ramadân."

"Have you any slave to set free ?" the Prophet asked.

"No," answered the man.

"Can you fast for two consecutive months ?" the Prophet asked.

"No," said the man.

Can you afford to feed sixty poor people ?
"No," again replied the man.

Whereupon the Prophet went into his house, brought some dates and told the man : "Take these and give them to some poor people."

The man asked : "Can I find any poorer than my own family ?"

Laughing, the Prophet said : "Then, take them to your family."

As for restitution, Abu Da'ud al-Athram and Ibn Mâja reported that the Prophet had ordered the man who slept with his wife during Ramadân fast to fast another day instead, in addition to the *Kaffâra.*

2) Fasting is also spoiled if a person deliberately vomits.

In this case he has to fast a day in restitution. Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet had said : "He who forces himself to vomit shall fast another day instead".

THINGS WHICH DO NOT SPOIL THE FAST

1) Involuntary vomiting. Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet had said : "He who is overcome by vomiting shall not make restitution".

2) The cupping of blood from the head. Thâbit Al-Bannâni asked Anas Ibn Mâlik : "Did the Prophet forbid head bleeding for the person who fasts ?" Anas said : "Not unless a person is weak".

3) Wet Dreams. The Prophet is reported to have said that a man's fast is not spoiled for involuntary vomiting or wet dreams".

4) Unintentional eating or drinking. The Prophet said : "Allah forgives my people for acts committed by mistake, or out of absent mindedness, and acts performed under compulsion." He also said that, "a man who fasts and who absent-mindedly eats or drinks shall continue his fast."

5) Rinsing the mouth and bathing in an attempt to reduce the effect of the summer heat. One of the Prophet's companions reported that he used "to see the Prophet pour water on his head while he was fasting".

6) If a man gets up in the morning in a state of ritual uncleanliness it does not affect his fast.

7) A man who eats, drinks or sleeps with his wife thinking that it is still before dawn. The same applies if he thinks that it is after sunset. There are two opinions in this respect :

(a) The fast is valid, for Allah said :

"You are not to blame for what you do by mistake, but you are for premeditated acts".

Zayd Ibn Wahb is reported to have said : "People broke the fast during the time of Omar Ibn al-Khattâb. I have seen water vessels, brought from the house of Hafsa, from which the people drank. Immediately, the sun appeared from behind a cloud. The people wanted to fast another day in restitution, but Omar intervened. "Why ?" he asked. "By Allah, we did not mean any wrong".

(b) The other school of thought makes restitution imperative.

8) Kohl does not spoil the fast. The Prophet is reported to have used it while fasting in Ramadân.

The rule about Kohl applies to eye drops, ear drops, or nose drops even if they reach the throat. This rule also covers snuff, road dust, intravenous, muscular, or subcutaneous injections. Some scholars have included enema under this heading because it comes out again, drawing forth that which it is intended that it draws out. The rule even applies to the smelling of strange

scents, to chewing gum, or tasting food, provided nothing of it reaches the stomach. Abu Muhammad Ibn Hazm summed it up as follows :

"Allah forbade us, during the fast, from eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, deliberate vomiting and sins. We know of no food or drink which could be consumed through the anus, urethra, ear, eye, nose from a wound in the abdomen or head. Apart from food and drink we are not prohibited from letting anything reach the stomach".

EXEMPTIONS FROM THE FAST

As we have said earlier, every Muslim who is adult and in possession of his faculties must fast Ramadân. They are exempted, however, in the following cases :

(a) Women in menstruation, or in child-birth bleeding.

(b) Persons on sick bed, or on a journey.

WOMEN WHO ARE BLEEDING DURING MENSTRUATION OR CHILD-BIRTH

1) Women in menstruation, or bleeding after giving birth, shall not fast.

2) If Ramadân begins while a woman is in menstruation or child-birth bleeding, she shall not fast until bleeding ceases in both cases and she takes the ritual bath.

3) If bleeding occurs during Ramadân, then a woman shall break the fast.

4) When bleeding ceases, a woman must wash and then fast.

If she does not find water, she must perform the ritual purification with sand (tayammum).

5) If bleeding ceases during the night, she can formulate the intention to fast and lose no time in washing but postpone taking a bath until after dawn, providing she does so before sunrise.

6) If a bleeding woman deliberately postpones the bath until after sunrise, thereby missing the morning prayers, then her fast shall *not* be valid.

7) A bleeding woman shall fast a number of days equal to those she missed because of bleeding. 'Aisha said : "In the Prophet's time we were ordered to compensate for fasting days missed in bleeding but were not ordered to perform restitution for our missed prayers".

THE SICK, AND PERSONS TRAVELLING

1) Out of Allah's mercy, a sick person or a traveller was instructed to fast a number of days equal to those he missed during Ramadân.

2) The Qurân did not mention any specific kind of sickness and did not describe the sickness which exempts a person from the fast during Ramadân. Therefore, a person suffering from any ailment

whatsoever of the stomach, side, eye, heart, etc... may apply this stipulation. The Qurân contains a general statement and does not specify the severity of pain or degree of danger involved.

Some of the early 'ulama granted the exemption even in the case of a painful finger.

3) The Qurân also did not specify, in the case of a journey, the distance or means of transport used. So the stipulation applies in all cases of travel whether a person is travelling on foot; on an animal ; by train, or by plane.

'Ulama differed, however, as to the distance which grants the exemption. Several authorities reported that one of the Prophet's companions, a man by the name of Dihya Ibn Kalifa travelled during Ramadân for about three miles and had considered the distance sufficient to justify his breaking the fast, as did a number of people who were with him.

4) The following are some regulations regarding travelling in Ramadân :

(a) A person may or may not break the fast if he happens to be travelling during Ramadân. Anas Ibn Mâlik said : "We used to travel with the Prophet. He never criticised those who had been fasting or those who had broken the fast."

(b) To break the fast is preferable if the journey threatens a person's health. Jâbir re-

ported that the Prophet passed a crowd with a man in their midst placed in the shade. Asking about the man, the Prophet was told he was fasting. Whereupon the Prophet said that it was not healthy to fast on the road.

(c) It is also preferable to break the fast when the warriors approach the enemy. Abu Sa'id reported : "We travelled in the company of the Prophet to Mecca. We were fasting and we approached Mecca. The Prophet told us : "You have neared your enemy and it will give you more strength if you break the fast".

(d) If a clash with the enemy is certain, then breaking the fast is imperative. Abu Sa'id, continuing his previous report, said : "Then we came closer to Mecca. The Prophet told us : "Tomorrow you will meet your enemy ; therefore break the fast.' And we did so."

(e) A traveller, who happens to be observing the fast, may break it any time he feels like doing. Ibn 'Abbâs said : "The Prophet and the believers went out during Ramadân in the year of the conquest of Mecca.

On the road they passed by a stream. It was noon and the thirsty people stretched out their necks while their souls burned with the desire to drink. The Prophet called for a vessel full of water which he held up on high so that everybody could see it. Then he drank and everybody else followed his example."

(f) One may break the fast before starting on a journey. Muhammad Ibn Ka'b said: "I called at the house of Anas Ibn Mâlik one day in Ramadân. Anas was preparing to go on a journey. His camel was saddled and he was dressed for the journey. He asked for food, which he ate, and I said to him : 'Is breaking the fast in this fashion a *sunnah* (an act of the Prophet) ?' He answered : 'Yes, it is a sunnah.' Then he mounted and left".

(g) If a man happens to enter during his journey a town where he does not intend to stay permantly, he may fast or break the fast. Ibn 'Abbâs reported : "The Prophet embarked on the conquest of Mecca during Ramadân. He observed the fast until he reached al-Kadid, a well between Qudayd and 'Usfân, then he broke the fast until the month had passed."

PREGNANT AND NURSING WOMEN

Pregnant and nursing women may break the Ramadân fast but shall fast a number of days, equal to those missed ,after pregnancy or nursing ceases. In other words, pregnant and nursing women are in the same position as a traveller, being free to choose between breaking the fast or keeping it.

According to a *hadith* related by Anas Ibn Mâlik al-Kâbi, the Prophet said : "God has relieved a traveller from part of the prayers and relieved him along with pregnant and nursing women from fasting."

Pregnant and nursing women mav also break the fast if they fear injury either to themselves or their infants

However, they should perform restitution.

OLD AGE

'Ulama have different opinions as regards old people.

Some 'ulama are of the opinion that if an old man is unable to fast, he may break the fast provided he feeds a poor man for each day he breaks the fast. This is what is meant by the term *fidyah*.

Others said that an old person was free not to observe the fast without *fidyah,* on the strength of the Qurânic verse. "On no soul does God place a burden greater than it can bear."

The stipulation regarding old persons applies to persons afflicted with incurable illnesses.

Sheikh Muhammad Abdu (a prominent scholar and one time rector of Al-Azhar) was of the opinion that people engaged in hard manual work like mining, or prisoners sentenced to hard labour, may break the fast if they can afford the *fidyah.*

VARIOUS ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS

1) The Prophet recommended taking the *sahûr* (night-time meal). He said : "Do not miss the *sahûr* for it is blessed ; take even a mouthful of

water. God and his angels greet those who take their *sahûr.*"

2) It is recommended to take the *iftâr* meal as early as possible and the *sahûr* meal as late as possible. The Prophet said : "My people are blessed as long as they take their *iftâr* early and their *sahûr* late".

Omar Ibn Maymûn stated that the Prophet's Companions were quick to take their *iftâr* and slow in beginning their *sahûr.*

3) The time for *sahûr* extends until dawn. If the call to the *fajr* (dawn) prayers is announced and a man still has the cup in his hand, he should not throw it away, but can satisfy himself. The Prophet said: "If a man hears the call while the cup is still in his hand, he shall not lay it down before he is through with it."

4) It is recommended that a man breaks the fast in the manner followed by the Prophet. Anas reported that the Prophet used to break the fast before he performed the sunset prayers, with a few ripe dates, or if not available, a few dry dates; or if not available, a few mouthfuls of water.

5) At *iftâr,* offer your thanks to God in the same words used by the Prophet. Mu'âdh Ibn Zahra reported that the Prophet used these words before partaking of *iftâr* : "I fasted for Your sake and broke the fast on what You gave me."

6) Continuing the fast without a break for another day is reprehensible. Ibn Omar reported that the Prophet had forbidden continuation of the fast.

When the Prophet's companions remarked that the Prophet himself did it, he retorded, "I am not like any of you. Allah feeds me and satisfies my thirst".

Abu Hurayra reported that the Prophet had said :

"Let no one continue the fast" repeating the command thrice. His companions observed that he did continue the fast whereupon the Prophet answered : "You are not like me. Allah feeds me and quenches my thirst. Do only the things you are capable of."

QADA (RESTITUTION)

1) You may perform the *qadâ* (fasting of other days as substitute for those missed in Ramadân) consequently or without sequence.

Ibn Omar reported that the Prophet had said : "Ramadân *qadâ* may be consecutive or split".

Muhammad Ibn al-Munkadir said : "A man asked the Prophet about splitting the *qadâ*. The Prophet advised : 'It is up to you. If a man were in debt, he could repay his debt in instalments — this is *qadâ*. Consequently, doing the same in the case of Ramadân *qadâ* is acceptable".

2) You may perform the *qadâ* any time during the year. 'Aisha was reported to have said : "Sometimes I was unable to perform the *qadâ* other than in Sha'bân."

If a man postpones the *qadâ* until he is overtaken by the next Ramadân, then he performs the *qadâ* after Ramadân.

Ibn Hazm said that the delay is, however, reprehensible, according to a verse from the Qurân which says : "Be quick in the race for forgiveness."

I'TIKAF (RETREAT) DURING RAMADAN

The Prophet set an example for retiring for contemplation during Ramadân as a form of devotion. He used to spend the last ten days of Ramadân in complete retirement in his mosque. 'Aisha said : "The Prophet used to retire the last ten days of Ramadân and continued this custom to the end of his life".

Ibn Omar reported that the Prophet, during the retreat period, had his bed placed in the mosque behind a pillar.

A person in retreat shall observe complete seclusion.

'A'isha said that "a person in retreat abstains from normal social life. He shall not even visit a sick man or attend a funeral or touch a woman. He goes out only to perform his natural functions".

A man in retreat may take a bath or have his hair cut and combed.

'A'isha said that she used to comb the Prophet's hair while he was in retreat.

I'tikâf can be performed in any mosque where group prayers are performed. The best-rewarded *i'tikâf* is that performed in one of three mosques, namely, at the Ka'ba in Mecca, the Prophet's Mosque in Medina and the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

THE NIGHT OF POWER (Laylat al-Qadr)

The Qurân was revealed on "the night of power, one of the nights of Ramadân *(Laylat al-Qadr)*. It is a night of great wonders and blessings which God described as "better than one thousand months".

This means that the reward of devotion during this night is better than the reward to be expected for devotion in one thousand months which do not include this night.

The great merit of this night is expounded in the sûra of the Qurân carrying the same name. Allah said : "We have revealed it (the Qurân) during the Night of Power".

"And what will convey to you the meaning of the Night of Power ?"

"The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. Therein descend the angels and the Spirit by the permission of their Allah, with all decrees."

"All is peace till the break of dawn."

The night has been variously fixed as the 21st, 23rd and the 25th of Ramadân. Ibn Hanbal reported that Ibn Omar had related a *hadîth* in which the Prophet said : "Whosoever seeks the night, let him seek it on the 27th".

It is meritorious during the nights when the Night of Power is sought, to spend the time in prayers, Qurânic recitation and asking God for forgiveness. The Prophet said :

"He who spends the Night of Power in prayers, in full faith, shall have all his previous sins and guilt forgiven".

'A'isha said : "I asked the Prophet what to say during that night, on the assumption that I knew it was the night.

He told me to say : "Allah, you love forgiveness, so forgive me."

VOLUNTARY FASTING (al-Tatawwu')

1) The best fast, next to the obligatory fasting, is to fast every other day. No one may fast more.

   Abdullah Ibn Amr once told the Prophet : "I have strength to fast". The Porphet told him:

   "Observe the fast of David, no more."

   Abdullah asked : "What is it ?"

   The Prophet answered : "Half the *dahr*."

In another version, according to al-Bukhârî, the Prophet answered : "Fast one day and break the fast another."

Abdullah observed : "But I can do better."

The Prophet said : "There is nothing better."

2) Another good procedure in voluntary fasting is to fast three days every month.

Abdullah said that the Prophet once asked him : "Abdullah, I was told that you spend the day in fasting and the night in prayer."

Abdullah answered in the affirmative, whereupon the Prophet commanded him : "Do not do so. Fast one day and break it the next. Pray part of the night and sleep the rest.

"You have an obligation towards your body, your eyes and your wife."

"It is enough to fast three days every month."
Your reward is tenfold."

3) It is recommended to fast on Mondays and Thursdays — provided the total fasting days do not exceed the *half-dahr* fast :

Hafsa said : "The Prophet used to fast Mondays and Thursdays."

4) It is also recommended to fast six days during the month of shawwâl (the month following Ramadân).

The Prophet said: "Fasting in Ramadân and following it with six days in Shawwâl is tantamount to the *dahr Siyâm* (all year round fast) Whoever makes a good deed is repaid tenfold."

5) It is recommended to fast the Day of 'Arafat (the days on which pilgrims stand at Mount 'Arafa in Mecca).

The Prophet said: "The 'Arafat fast redeems two years... one past and one future."

6) Among the days of voluntary fasting is the Day of Ashoura. Ibn 'Abbâs said: "I know of no other day than Ashoura, which the Prophet fasted in recognition of its merits over all other days".

7) The month of Muharram is good for voluntary fasting. The Prophet was asked about the best fast next to Ramadân. He said: "al-Muharram."

8) It is recommended to fast the greater part of Sha'bân. 'Aisha said: "The Prophet used to fast for a complete month only in Ramadân. Next to that he fasted most often in Sha'bân.

FORBIDDEN FASTING

1) Fasting is not permitted on the doubtful day.

2) The Day of 'Id al-Fitr (the day following the end of Ramadân) as it has been previously explained.

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri said that the Prophet had forbidden fasting on two days, namely, the day of al-Fitr and the day of *al-Nahr* the day the pilgrims offer sacrifice).

3) The days of *tashriq* (the three days following the day of *al-Nahr,* that is, the 11th, 12th and 13th of the month of Dhu'l-Hijja.

Ka'b Ibn Mâlik reported that he and Aws Ibn al-Hadthan were ordered by the Prophet to announce to the people : "None but a believer enters paradise... the days of Mina (i.e. during the pilgrimage) are days for eating and drinking".

Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqâs said that the Prophet had ordered him to announce to the people that there is no fast during the day of Mina. A group of 'ulama consider fasting during those days to be reprehensible.

4) Friday should not be a fasting day. The Prophet said : "Do not devote Friday night for *Qiyâm* (night-long prayer) or Friday for fasting".

5) The *dahr* fast (all the year round) is reprehensible. The Prophet said : "He who fasts the whole year does not fast. Who fasts the *dahr* finds himself in hell".

6) A woman shall not perform the voluntary fast without the permission of her husband. The Prophet said : "No woman shall fast without her husband's permission except in Ramadân."

Muslim (Hijra) calendar :

Muharram.

Safar.

Rabî' Awwal.

Rabî' Thani.

Jumâdal-ûla.

Jumâdal-Thaniya.

Rajab.

Sha'bân.

Ramadân.

Shawwâl.

Dhul'Qa'da.

Dhul'l-Hijja.

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